

PAP adopts resolution to forge the way forward

NEO CHAI CHIN
chaichin@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE — Invoking the People's Action Party's (PAP) "democratic socialist" ideals, Prime Minister and party Secretary-General Lee Hsien Loong yesterday exhorted members of the ruling party to uphold an open and

compassionate meritocracy, build a fair and just society and strengthen the Singaporean identity.

These were among the key features of a new resolution — the second in the PAP's history — adopted by more than 1,000 party members at the PAP annual convention at Kallang Theatre.

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

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● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Analysts said the resolution is a sign of the PAP gearing up for the General Election, which is due by 2016.

As he outlined what it means to be "fair and just" in Singapore's "new phase" of development, Mr Lee announced that a PAP Seniors Group chaired by Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob and advised by Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong has been set up to pilot new solutions to eldercare needs and engage senior party activists to mentor their younger counterparts.

Details of a Pioneer Generation Package, first announced at his National Day Rally in August, should be ready by next year's Budget in February.

The PAP's broad goals of building a multi-racial society fair and just to all, and providing equal opportunities to all Singaporeans, have not changed, said Mr Lee, adding that the party will "always stand for and defend" its democratic socialist ideals.

"They are still the right thing to do and I think in 20 years' time when we hold a party convention, I think these ideas will still be at the core of what we want to do. But what do these ideas mean tangibly, concretely, in this day and age?"

The new resolution was the product of five pre-convention sessions involving more than 500 activists held in October and last month. The last resolution was adopted in 1988 and presented to Parliament as a Green Paper for debate and consultation, after the 1984 General Election when two Opposition members — Mr J B Jeyaretnam and Mr Chiam See Tong — were elected to Parliament.

PAP Organising Secretary Chan Chun Sing noted that the convention could mark the midpoint between the 2011 General Election and the next. The party should "take stock of our progress and chart the way forward", he added.

On the timing of the resolution,

political analysts said it was a sign that the PAP was ramping up its preparations for the next GE.

"It's good to have a document to crystallise what they stand for," said Dr Gillian Koh, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies. "It's also a way to ready the troops because they'll be in the second half of the term and they really have to get their engagement (with the ground) going and ... they must be able to tell the public what they stand for."

Singapore Management University law professor and Nominated Member of Parliament Eugene Tan said the resolution was not only a call to action to the party faithful but was "very much targeted at Singaporeans and the international community". "The PAP seeks to impress upon Singaporeans that it is fully alive to their key concerns," said Associate Professor Tan, who added that the resolution was "a return to the fundamentals, in which the PAP seeks to position itself not just as a political party but as a grassroots movement for Singapore".

Mr Lee, who had spoken passionately about creating opportunities for all at the August rally, yesterday reiterated that an open and compassionate meritocracy was about maximising equality of opportunity, while moderating inequality of outcomes.

He said strengthening the Singaporean identity is the first item in the resolution "because it is that important". Adding that race and religion remain "very powerful forces", the Prime Minister noted that each community wants more of its requirements to be institutionalised — such as more Special Assistance Plan schools for the Chinese, donning the hijab for Muslim women who wear uniforms at work and wider use of Tamil in public signs for Indians. But there is a need to maintain common space even as groups are given freedom to practise their religions.

Mr Lee also rallied party members, saying that only the PAP can provide the national leadership needed to take Singapore forward. "Only the PAP can provide this leadership — even the Opposition says, 'Don't worry, the PAP will take care of everything, quite safe.'"